

The Medical Cannabis Advocate's Handbook

USING THE TOOLS IN YOUR TOOL KIT

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Political campaigns are made up of a variety of strategies and tactics. These strategies and tactics can range dramatically in costs, needed skill level, time, and effectiveness. Every medical cannabis advocate has many low to no-cost tools at their disposal. Exploring the various types of advocacy tools and knowing when to use them are the most important parts of executing a strategic campaign to meet your goals. The exact mix of tools you apply to your campaign depends on the goals and objectives you're trying to reach and on the means you have available to reach them.

Some are relatively passive, like writing a letter to the editor or calling a congressional representative. Other tools are more active - speaking at a city council meeting or protesting in public. There are also times when activists use dramatic tools to make a point, like staging a "sit in" at an elected official's office or even barricading the door to a public building. Not every tool is appropriate for any given situation. Choosing the right tool for the right situation can save you time and bring you closer to attaining your goals.

A. TYPES OF ACTIVIST TOOLS

- I. **Use your VOICE** to make yourself heard. To manifest change it is important for advocates to **ASK FOR ACTION** from those with the power to enact reform. Campaigns are most often started by

using voice-based advocacy tools including letters, emails or phone calls to elected officials, signing a petition, voting, writing letters to the editor, doing media interviews, and new online advocacy tools, such as Facebook campaigns, Twitter, and blogs.

- II. **Use your BODY** to make yourself seen. To enhance your call for action, it is important for advocates to be seen by those who hold the power to facilitate change. Some body-based advocacy tools include meetings with lawmakers and their staff, demonstrations and rallies, court support, testifying at public hearings, press conferences, public outreach and educational events, tabling, coalition building, engaging in emergency raid response, legal observing, and signature gathering.
- III. **Use your FREEDOM** to highlight injustice through the use of non-violent direct action. Some examples of freedom-based tools include blocking the DEA from raiding a dispensary, a sit-in at an elected official's offices, and disrupting the normal flow of business at government buildings or other locations associated with those who can make achieving your goals possible.



B. DEFINING TYPES OF ACTIONS:

Direct Action v. Symbolic Action

- Direct actions are those that an activist takes to exert an immediate or direct influence over someone who has the power to help achieve your goals. When you attend a city council meeting and ask the members to adopt a medical cannabis ordinance in your city, you are engaging in direct action because you are speaking



- directly to the individuals who have the power to adopt the ordinance.
- Symbolic actions are those that you take to make a statement outside the presence of those who have the power to make change happen. Attending a medical cannabis rally at the park is a symbolic action because it does not communicate directly to someone who has the power to do what you want. Instead, it makes a broader or more generalized statement about the issue.

The distinction between symbolic and direct actions may get blurry, so be careful to avoid getting caught up in semantics. What is important is that you know which kind of tool you are choosing to use so that you can decide if it is appropriate for the situation at hand. Consider the chart below as a guide for what tool you are using in each situation and why it may be appropriate.

TOOL	DIRECT or SYMBOLIC	APPROPRIATE WHEN
Marching down a city street with banners and signs	Symbolic	Building or demonstrating public support
Speaking with your lawmakers	Direct	You have a specific action you want your representative to take or for general education
Picketing a business	Direct	You want to encourage the store to change a policy you dislike
Displaying a bumper sticker	Symbolic	You are communicating a general message to anyone who sees it
Blockading the door to a public building	Direct	You want to make a dramatic statement by denying access to the building until a demand is met

C. THE ART OF ESCALATING YOUR TACTICS

Now that you know what kinds of tools are available, it is important to decide when it is appropriate to use a specific type of action. The phrase escalation of tactics refers to a strategy of using relatively less aggressive tactics early in your efforts, then escalating to more dramatic tools later in the process. Many enthusiastic activists forget to escalate tactics—always staying at a relatively passive level or skipping directly to something with more impact. Escalating tactics will help you be more effective and help maintain your credibility with those you are trying to influence.

The first step in any political action is usually to simply ask those with the power to do what you want them to do. If you want your city council to regulate medical cannabis collectives, you should start by asking them to do it. You can do this at a meeting, in a letter, or on the telephone. Do not overlook this simple step. Once in a while, they may just do what you ask!

More often, however, the initial ask will be an opportunity to identify your allies and opponents and set the stage for a credible

escalation of tactics.

It is not reasonable to escalate tactics before clearly articulating to change-makers what you want. Doing so will alienate your intended audience and potential supporters. You will have a hard time being persuasive if you start by picketing city hall before asking for change. Once you have asked, you have put the council on notice of what you want and set the stage for escalation—if needed.

Examples of Escalating Tactics

Below is a general example of a strategy that uses the escalation of tactics. This example utilizes a strategy that targets elected officials and tactics are listed in the rough order that they could be used:

1. Calls/e-mails to elected officials
2. Gather petitions
3. Meet with elected officials
4. Build coalitions
5. LTE about elected officials
6. Testify at public hearings
7. Protest elected officials outside offices
8. Sit-in elected officials